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PREFACE

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THIS book presents the life and culture of the Lovedu, a Bantu tribe in South Africa. Its central figure is a sacred queen. Against the background of our world, she no doubt appears unreal in some respects, like the baseless fabric of a dream, but in others she is real enough. We can, for instance, readily visualize her, without official husband to cramp her authority, bearing her successor by a secret consort; or maintaining her strategic position at the centre of the tribe by re-distributing as favours the wives she receives as tribute. But it is a different and far more difficult matter to depict as real what we regard as mysterious; for, hallowed by a heritage of incest, she is chosen for her role by the ghost of her predecessor, and her destined end is death by her own hands, in order that she may rule by divine right. We have tried to show that these mysteries become realities when we see them as means to the supreme end of consecrating her power to make rain, and when we realize that this power implies control of half the cosmic forces and gives men faith to do their daily tasks.

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Our main object has been to describe the culture of the Lovedu. We have set ourselves the task of showing the nature of its parts and their relation to one another. Some space is devoted to the royal institutions; the network of links woven by kinship, marriage and marriage cattle; the legal procedure of compromise and appeasement; and various aspects of magic, witchcraft, and religion. Considered as a whole, the culture emerges as a structure supporting and in turn supported by the Rain-Queen. We may think of the royal institutions as the foundations upon which men build for safety against famines and foes; the culture dispenses with reliance upon garden magic for success of the crops and upon a military system for national defence. Marriage cattle and the kin can be regarded as forging a frame which firmly holds the society together, binding its families, foreign groups and territorial units to one another and to the queen. Stresses and strains are taken by flexible devices for adjusting disputes by conciliation. A cult of masks and man-made mysteries appears to surmount the edifice like spires and pinnacles; we may envisage it as the cultural handling of those enigmas of nature, the exalted themes of growth and fertility.

Next, we have tried to outline the attitudes and interests of the people. They appear as carriers of the culture oriented toward the central figure and helping one another to bear the burden of a timeless society. Our chief concern has been to show how their ideals and motives have been moulded by the culture; why, for instance, they frown upon competition and appraise moderation, and how it is that they are not troubled by sex-guilt or inferiority complexes. We have finally turned to consider some aspects of culture contact, such as the fear and distrust of the agents of an acquisitive society against whom the carriers of the culture have no weapons save secrecy and deception.

In describing these lineaments of Lovedu society, as its stands facing the onslaught of Western civilization, we have set forth the general

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principles, but eschewed the details. Upon a limited canvas we have striven to draw the main outlines in such a way as both to maintain the proportions of the culture and to interest the general reader as well as the student. Much is left unsaid about such aspects of the culture as the manner in which men try to harness the powers of nature and to condition the individual to his social function, the basic assumptions of the magico-religious world and the elements imparted to the culture by contact with other peoples, both African and European. We have not touched upon many aspects usually dealt with in the larger anthropological monographs. In view of our general object, we have omitted not only whole subjects of interest to the anthropologist, such as birth and death ceremonial, arts and crafts, village organization and kinship terminology, but also details on practices of importance to specialists, such as care of cattle, cultivation, diet and diseases, land tenure and medicine. While we believe that the many omissions do not detract from the essential balance and unity of the whole, it is our intention to fill in the gaps with articles on specialized aspects of the culture, and with additional books on larger topics such as law and judicial arrangements, marriage and social organization, magic, and religion. Too much must not be expected in the present volume.

Our contacts with the Lovedu began more than ten years ago with short visits of a month each in 1928, 1930, and 1932. These visits served as an introduction, but sustained field investigation was rendered possible only when, between 1936 and 1938, we held a Fellowship of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures. During this period we were in the field sixteen and a half months in all: April to July, 1936, November, 1936, to July, 1937, September and October, 1937, and May to August, 1938. In some of the intervening periods, while one of us was ill, the other as far as possible maintained personal touch with the Lovedu and, in order to verify some of our observations and to investigate a ceremony not held since 1905, we also paid some visits of a few days each in 1939.

Except to mention two points, we shall refrain from expounding our methods of investigation. The principles we adopted were, on the one hand, personal and intensive local observation, and, on the other, comparative investigation over a large area. Personal observation is essential because, though verbal accounts given by reliable informants may serve as useful starting-points, they generally not only are unconsciously idealized, but assume a background unknown to the investigator and often entirely escaping his attention. Accounts may reflect theory and ideals, but often give a very wrong impression of practice and real life; they never convey atmosphere and personal relationships. By comparative study, we obtained a mass of valuable clues as to lines of inquiry or interpretation which we could follow up and check by further local and intensive as well as extensive observation.

Personal observation is tiring, slow to yield results, and usually objectionable to the Lovedu; but in the end the rewards are great. After a long day's work, it is distasteful, but often essential, to keep awake all night sitting in the stifling atmosphere of a hut crowded with dancing,

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CHAPTER XVI

TRIBAL TRAITS AND ATTITUDES

Harmonizing the bases of social security with outlets for personal expression—the role of beer—moderation as an ideal and in the spheres of sex and authority—preoccupation with the quest for health—attitudinal reaction to the Western world.

121 WE have drawn a rough outline of Lovedu culture and have lightly sketched in some of the forms of its institutions. From this has emerged the shape and structure of the society. The picture is, of course, incomplete, but we may perhaps give it tone by filling into the forms the shades of movement and motivation, and character by adding the colour of traits and attitudes. We have to undertake this task without the many forms which we have not sketched at all and, far more serious, without the wider background of surrounding cultures which would throw our picture into true perspective. To make good these omissions at this stage is impossible; all we can do is to orientate ourselves from a few familiar principles which will guide us in presenting our picture of the traits and interests of the Lovedu. These are the principles of man's wish for security, for achievement and for recreation.

Man must feel free to act without undue fear and uncertainty, and society must so order its arrangements that its members feel safeguarded against threats to their welfare; hence we in European society have our insurance systems which reduce the risks of our ventures, our legal sanctions which ensure the fulfilment of our expectations, and our conception of a righteous providence which consoles us in the face of a ruthless fate. Man's striving towards self-expression and recognition must also be satisfied, and society cannot neglect to demarcate spheres for, and to reward, individual achievement, though this is no simple matter because the opportunities that stimulate must be co-ordinated with the stability and security by which men may calculate the probability of the success of their ventures. Man also craves for recreation, adventure, and change from the monotony of those activities that are necessary to keep body and soul together; and here again the avenues that society provides must be integrated with the requirements of security and self-expression. Each society handles and co-ordinates these themes in a different manner; in one society, for instance, achievement is defined in terms of wealth or of ousting a rival; in another, in terms of wisdom or co-operation with others. The manner in which any particular society defines or handles these themes determines the interests, aims, values, and attitudes of its members; and it is from this point of view that we shall attempt to portray the Lovedu.

241 Lovedu culture is diversified: it is not like a man motivated by a one-track mind, or a fanatic obsessed by a single overpowering mania. But among its many interests, agriculture takes the first place. More time and energy are given to agricultural than to any other activities; no competing interest will move man to neglect ploughing and reaping, and no

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174 Sekhopo, splitting off from the Lovedu royal group (*c.* 1800) and subjected to Pedi-highveld-Sotho influences, though only twenty miles from Ulovedu, are less like their present-day Lovedu royal relatives than are the Tswale. But the Tswale are foreigners, tracing descent from the Venda royal house of Thoho-ya-Ndou; they entered the Lovedu sphere of influence (*c.* 1730), and they lost close touch with the main body of the Venda (*c.* 1840). In language and almost all major aspects of culture the Tswale have been Loveduized. They have not adopted the specialized Lovedu royal complex of institutions, but equally they have lost their characteristically Venda elements. Thus, of Venda elements, they have given up the *dɔmbɔ* and *thɔndɔ* 'schools' and the attribution of extensive powers to a high god; even the peculiar Venda disposition of forces and persons in the political organization is little more than a memory; and differences in detail from the Lovedu, such as peeling the skin off a goat's tail before killing it ritually, which is a royal Venda feature, are no greater than the differences found between one district and another in Ulovedu itself. These are not isolated instances of divergent cultural evolution in response to divergent environments and contacts. Dozens of examples emerge from an historical and comparative investigation of the Northern Transvaal alone.

●121 In the whole of our field investigation, nothing has been more fruitful and stimulating than our visits to twenty-six Northern Transvaal tribes. There can be no doubt that, had there been time to study ten times that number of tribes over a much wider area, the value and suggestiveness of the comparative and historical background would have been correspondingly enhanced, against which the direction. nature, and magnitude of cultural changes might be evaluated. There arise problems of method, even of the legitimacy of making inferences from one tribe to another. We shall not deal with them here except to say that breadth and depth of observation and fertility of interpretation largely depend upon the range of one's knowledge and experience. If inferences from variations within the tribe are legitimate—nay, absolutely necessary —for the most elementary presentation or generalization, by the same reasoning they must be legitimate across the boundaries of tribes. Culture elements, culture patterns, and the major cultural configurations do not stop short upon the borders of districts, nor of tribes, nor even of culture areas.

Comparative study has enabled us to see in actual being the diffusion of culture elements across the boundaries of districts, tribes, and culture areas. The different handling by different cultures of the same cultural material, according to the needs of their environment or the genius or emphases of their patterns, can be observed and its results established without any doubt by comparative investigation. Once it can be determined that the raw cultural material is the same, deductions from variations in forms and functions or in purposes and goals are far from being illegitimate, but illuminate the distinctive trends of the cultures in which they occur. Inferences from incommensurable variations are illegitimate; but the wider the range of comparison and the more intensive the functional investigation, the easier it is to eliminate this error

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and the more precisely can be estimated, not only the nature, direction, and magnitude of change, but also the relation of the change to the forms and purposes of the culture in which it is found.

Comparative study, as a technique of interpreting culture and its evolution, must go hand in hand with historical investigation. Both the past that survives in the memory of the carriers of the culture and the present are functionally important. They give us some of the clues to the psychological forces that cause or resist change and they provide data upon the nature of institutional evolution. But man is more than his memory and the living past is far more than the remembered past. So much is self-evident to a carrier of the culture that it will never be mentioned by an informant and will wholly escape the investigator's attention unless, with the aid of sustained comparative and historical study, he discovers the key that unlocks the memory and opens the way to the socially unconscious, that system of codes and standards which, without being conscious, condition experience and behaviour and are themselves conditioned by the social, psychological determinants of the past. Historical study is important for understanding the attitudes and reactions of the present, for estimating the evolution of forms and institutions, and for evaluating the relation to and reaction upon one another, not only of attitudes and forms, but also of the psychology of the people and the material content of the culture.

Culture change, according to this approach, must be investigated and interpreted, not merely functionally, but also relatively to the past and to reactions in other tribes. The method may be called relativistic functionalism. It implies observation and interpretation, not merely of the forms and functions of institutions within tribes, but also of the differential process of incorporation or rejection, under different conditions and in different tribes, of new culture elements.

This is not the place to justify this approach or to examine its theoretical and practical implications. All we need say is that, among the Lovedu, exceptionally good material exists for applying this method. Various sections of the Lovedu, as well as of numerous other tribes, of diverse origin and culture, have been subjected to diverse cultural influences for different but determinable periods of time, and their interpenetration can be studied in relation to both time and space. Particularly instructive are the differential responses to such patterns as the Venda royal complex of institutions and the transformations and modifications impressed upon such cultural material as the 'schools'. Thus, for instance, the royal pattern of the Kwinde (Venda royal group) can be studied in a chain of tribes of Kwinde ancestry extending into Bulovedu, some of whom have been subjected to intimate and long continued, others to less intimate and shorter, Lovedu contact. But this royal pattern has also interpenetrated other cultures, imposing itself upon the heterogeneous peoples incorporated by the Kwinde, like Koni, Karanga, Nyai, and Laudi, and leaving diverse impressions upon politically independent tribes such as the Dzkwa, Birwa, Nareni, and Lovedu. The differential interpenetration, especially of the various branches of the Lovedu, enables us to arrive at important conclusions.

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Oral traditions of the past, it is said, are unreliable and unverifiable. Accounts by informants about the present are also unreliable and often, unless one lives a lifetime in the society, unverifiable. Even the most elementary facts observed do not speak for themselves and have to be interpreted, and the verification of objective facts becomes a complicated process not unlike verification of historical material from such circumstantial evidence as is provided by comparative study. Certainly, in our experience, what was impressive was the substantial agreement among all the tribes upon the main events and migrations, which also provided useful clues to diffusions of culture in the past. The lack of discrimination as regards place and time and the dramatizations and justifications were difficulties which gradually disappeared as the background of comparison was enlarged. Even the discrepancies, seen against the total background, illuminated the local trends and motivations, and proved to be more apparent than real.

Most men of the Lovedu royal group to-day deny their Karanga ancestry, although ten years ago they admitted it. You will tap their memories in vain to discover either the truth or the reason for the change of attitude. But in the light of comparative investigation—for this phenomenon is not unique among the tribes—and of a study of reactions between 1926 and 1936, the change is intelligible. The suspicion that the releasing of land to the Native under the Land Act, in pursuance of a segregation policy, might be a device to dispossess the tribe engendered a profound disturbance to men's sense of security, which could be re-established only by affirming the title of immemorial occupation of Vuloyedu. The method of relativistic functionalism ensures, not merely perspective, but also balanced and comprehensive interpretations.

INTERPENETRATION OF THE TRIBES

Lovedu culture as it is to-day is the result of a complicated historical process. For some indication of the genesis of the tribe and of its culture, the reader is referred to the accompanying map; we cannot discuss the evidence in this book.

More than 300 years ago there were tribes sparsely scattered over the whole of the Northern Transvaal. This area lay outside the main migratory currents: Nguni and Tonga coming down on the east, Sotho-Tswana circling the curve of the Limpopo on the west, and Karanga halting between these two to the north of the tsetse-fly belt along the Limpopo. The date of these migrations and their relation to one another is lost in oblivion, but trickles from these currents and backwater eddying from them, particularly from the Sotho-Tswana current, penetrated into the Lovedu lowveld. There were, however, Kwena and Ngwato who descended the escarpment in force only after arrival on the highveld of invaders from the east (Koni, *c.* 1700), the south or south-west (Ɔokwa, *c.* 1760, and Moletahe, *c.* 1750), and the north (Virwa, *c.* 1780). Some of these Kwena and Ngwato form a chain of peoples, no longer independent, from the north, round the west and to the south of Vuloyedu, into the political and cultural structure of which many have been incorporated.